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Citation for Taqīyah

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Taqīyah

Taqīyah is the precautionary dissimulation of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution. Muslims recognize the personal duty of affirming right and forbidding wrong, but they also admit that, when confronted by an overwhelming injustice that threatens the well-being of an individual, this obligation can be fulfilled secretly in the heart rather than overtly. Among Shī'ī Muslims, who from the death of the Prophet onward considered themselves subject to persistent religious persecution by the Sunnī majority and the holders of political power, a further extension of this principle allowed not merely passive or silent resistance, but an active dissimulation of true beliefs when required to protect life, property, and religion itself.

The classic case defining the practice of *taqīyah* is that of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, prophet Muḥammad's cousin, whom the Shī'ah hold to have been his sole, chosen successor. Instead of insisting immediately on his God-given right to lead the Muslim community, 'Alī temporarily acquiesced to the rule of his numerous opponents in the interest of preserving himself and his cause for eventual restoration. 'Alī swore loyalty to false leaders whom the Shī'ah have otherwise condemned as heretics. Qur'ānic support for such *taqīyah* is given by *sūrah*3:28: "Believers should not accept as protecting friends unbelievers rather than believers... unless [it is done] as a precaution in order to guard yourselves from them [or, out of fear of them]." The phrase "as a precaution," as used in this verse, yields the term *taqīyah*. A further Qur'ānic example is *sūrah*16:106: "Whoever expresses disbelief in God after once believing [will suffer greatly], unless that person is under compulsion while yet remaining at peace in belief in the heart." This second verse refers to the case of a Muslim whose parents, rather than renouncing their faith as did the son, accepted martyrdom. The son's temporary act of coerced apostasy was, nonetheless, subsequently forgiven. The Shī'ah see this as further justification for the practice of *taqīyah*.

By the time of the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 765), widespread, clandestine pro-Shī'ah movements had adopted *taqīyah* to hide revolutionary activities. Imam Ja'far, in contrast, urged his followers to accept their minority status peacefully and, in place of revolt, to practice a form of permanent *taqīyah* that became, instead, a doctrine of religious quietism. The Shī'ah began to interpret *sūrah*49:13, "the most noble among you in the eyes of God is the most God-fearing," as a recommendation for *taqīyah*. The verb "to fear God," which has the same root as the term *taqīyah*, conveys the latter meaning only secondarily. The Shī'ah under Imam Ja'far, however, began to interpret this verse as signifying that "the most noble... is the one who practices *taqīyah* most."

After Imam Ja'far's time, the conditions of persecution, apparent and otherwise, promoted an increasing reliance on this concept, leading eventually to the disappearance of the final imam of the Twelvers—an act that some Shī'ah regard as the ultimate imposition of *taqīyah*, the idea being that, until the imam's own reappearance, all later periods belong to an age of *taqīyah*. One of the most prominent authorities of the tenth century, Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991) insisted that "until the Imam appears *taqīyah* is obligatory, and it is not permissible to dispense with it."

Many scholars, such as the great Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022), however, saw in this absolute declaration a dangerous tendency, which they sought to modify. Having once declared that all future statements will be under the rule of *taqīyah*, no later statement, even those concerning *taqīyah* itself, can be accepted at face value. Opponents of the Shī'ah, then and now, fully understand this paradox; the practice of *taqīyah* allows the Shī'ah to say anything and make any claim; no utterance of theirs is to be trusted. To counter this, those like al-Mufīd attempted to set more precise rules for the use of *taqīyah*, readily admitting that the duty of *taqīyah* is not the same for all people or all situations. It is not, therefore, an absolute obligation.

Nevertheless, *taqīyah* was and is practiced broadly by the Shī'ah and other minorities, and it continues to be recognized as a characteristic doctrine of the Shī'ah in general. In more modern times, especially after the Šafavids (1501–1722) made Twelver Shiism the state religion of Iran, the necessity of a doctrine of universal *taqīyah* has diminished. The Shī'ah, moreover, have been sensitive to the charge of always dissimulating their true beliefs and have accordingly, like al-Mufīd, rejected unrestricted *taqīyah* in favor of a more limited application. Modern discussions of *taqīyah* thus revolve around the issue of what conditions require it as a religious obligation and what conditions merely permit its use without incurring blame. A tendency to claim that the nobler course is to abstain from practicing it, if at all possible, is nearly always present. The modern consensus, which is based on a continuous tradition in juridical literature, is as follows: *taqīyah* may never be employed if it will result directly in the death of another Muslim; it is obligatory only when there is a definite danger that cannot be avoided and against which there is no hope; and it is permitted (discretionary) in the face of a danger to one's own life, that of a family member, the loss of virtue of a female family member, or the serious deprivation of livelihood. Some allow certain conditions of expediency, but the general attitude is that these are areas where, although *taqīyah* may be practiced without blame, it would be preferable (and more noble) not to.

Even so, in those areas where Shī'ah, and as another example, the Druze, continue to confront dangerous opposition, *taqīyah* persists as an important factor in religious belief and practice. The Shī'ah for example, still insist that their numbers are systematically undercounted in the censuses of several countries, because adherents there observe *taqīyah*. The Druze, in line with their distant

Shī'ī origins and continued minority status, preserve the doctrine of *taqīyah* even where current governments in their regions have tried to promote free expression.

See also SHĪ'Ī ISLAM.

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